

**AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:**

*Please replace the abstract with the following new abstract:*

A process for the preparation of beads having a crosslinked inorganic matrix with a size controlled in the millimeter range, which comprises pouring a suspension comprising a precursor of the inorganic matrix and an alginate dropwise into a solution of a polyvalent cation salt, to obtain a reaction medium, wherein the reaction medium has a pH of less than 3, and crosslinking the precursor of the inorganic matrix by a sol-gel process.